

Minutes of a meeting of the Policy and Finance Committee held in The New Millennium Chamber, The Manor House, Church Street, Littlehampton BN17 5EW on Monday 16 September 2024 at 6.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Butcher - Chair
Councillor Tandy
Councillor Lee
Councillor May
Councillor Northeast
Councillor Dr Walsh KStJ
Councillor Woodman

In attendance:

Laura Chrysostomou – Town Clerk
Juliet Harris – Assistant Town Clerk
Sofia Chittenden – Communications and Marketing Manager
Jemima Craven – Events and Town Centre Strategy Manager
Melanie Nicholls – Temporary Project Support Manager
Miriam Nicholls – Business and Economy Manager, Arun District Council

2024 to 2025

20. Evacuation Procedures

The evacuation procedures were noted.

21. Filming of Council Meetings, Use of Social Media, and Mobile Phones

The procedures were noted.

22. Apologies

There were no apologies.

23. Declarations of interest

Members and Officers were reminded to make any declarations of disclosable, pecuniary, or personal and prejudicial interests that they might have in relation to items on the agenda. The standing declarations were noted. Councillor Tandy declared a personal interest in agenda item 8.1.

Consultation on Proposed Changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, as a Member of Arun District Council's Planning Policy Committee. He confirmed that when considering this matter, he would do so without predetermination, taking into account the papers that were before him at that meeting.

24. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2024 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

25. Chair's Report and Urgent Items

25.1. Business Crime Reduction Partnership (BCRP)

The Chair reported that the funding partners for the BCRP had met earlier that day to initiate the project. The funding partners were the Safer Arun Partnership, Bognor Regis BID (Business Improvement District), Littlehampton Town Council and Sussex Police with the Town Council committed to providing £12,000 with the conditions as agreed by the Committee in June. It was noted that the BCRP Manager would be managed by the District Council's Economic Team and that work was underway to prepare a role profile and job description. This would include defined and measurable outputs which would be monitored by the partnership. This update was welcomed by the Committee.

It was resolved that:

The update be noted.

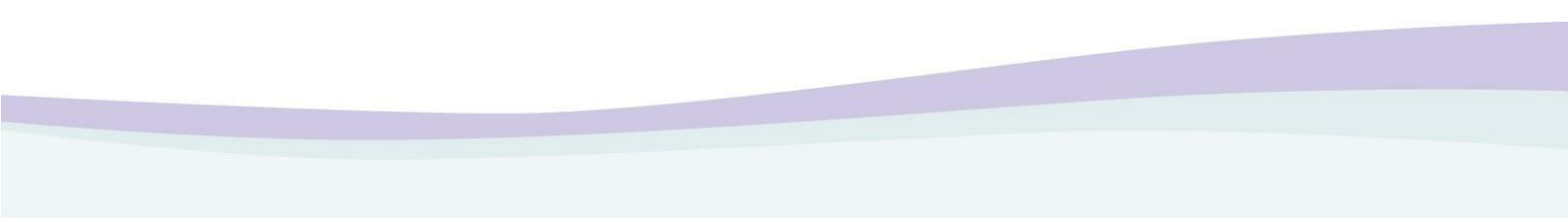
26. Public Forum

There was one member of the public present and no representations.

27. Officers Reports – Non-Exempt

27.1. Consultation on Proposed Changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

27.1.1. Members were asked to consider the previously circulated consultation on proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework. It was observed that there were no changes to the way in which neighbourhood plans operated, and that the bulk of the proposals related to the local planning authority's responsibilities. The Committee felt that there were many questions that only Arun District Council could answer and that the Town Council should represent the views of residents on those planning policies that specifically impacted on the Town.



- 27.1.2. These were policies that related to the delivery of more affordable housing and the provision of infrastructure to support housing growth. There was a strong view that the failure to keep pace with the need for low-cost housing in the parish had been detrimental to the local community and in some cases contributed towards the breakup of family units that provide social stability. Members therefore wished to emphasis the need for the NPPF to have greater focus on prioritizing policies that encouraged the delivery of good quality, sustainable social and low-cost housing.
- 27.1.3. Coupled with this was the overwhelming need for reform to the way in which infrastructure was delivered. Whilst members' comments in this respect focused on roads, local experience had shown that this was equally true of primary health care provision and education. In terms of how members would like to see the NPPF respond to this it was considered that more should be done to strengthen the ability of local planning authorities to secure and enforce the timely and better coordinated delivery of these gains. Not only would this benefit new residents coming into the parish, it would also help promote the parish as an area that could support economic growth and attract better quality employment opportunities. Conscious that the Town Council's response would carry more weight with the inclusion of examples of failed infrastructure delivery, the Committee considered it essential that it referenced the recent decision not to proceed with the A27 Arundel Bypass scheme and the indefinite deferral of the new primary school in north Littlehampton.
- 27.1.4. Finally, whilst the proposed NPPF policy changes clearly aimed to promote the creation of environmental initiatives including clean energy, the Committee considered that the NPPF policies on climate change initiatives could be strengthened.

It was therefore resolved that:

Authority be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chair of the Committee to finalise the Town Council's response to these proposals in line with the comments in minutes 21.1.1. to 21.1.4. above.

27.2 Policy Review Update

- 27.2.1. Members had before them a report, previously circulated, detailing the progress of the work undertaken by the Policy Task and Finish Group as it related to the Data Protection policies within the remit of the Committee. The report was presented by the Temporary Project Support Manager who explained that the policies the Committee were being asked to endorse included changes that were needed to better reflect information regarding public rights to access information and the legal basis for it. This also included current guidance which had improved in the years since the introduction of the General Data Protection legislation.

27.2.2. Reflecting on the detail contained in the revised Privacy Notice and subject access requests, it was acknowledged that these requests did not have to be in writing. Members therefore sought assurance that guidance would be provided to officers to ensure that the procedure was followed, and that authorisation had been obtained. Members also wished to be informed of data breaches and the findings in addition to any feedback from the Information Commissioner. It was confirmed that all staff would be trained on their responsibilities, and that the internal guidance and reporting documentation (which should only be completed by the Person Responsible for Data Protection) already included an instruction to advise Council. It was agreed that the data breaches policy be updated to reflect the reporting to Council requirement.

27.2.3. Turning to the recommendation regarding the change to the default review date for all policies in the Town Council's Policies Policy, it was noted that during the review it had become apparent that it would be more sensible to change to "at least once every four years." This was considered practical as it would mean each administration would have gained the experience and insight to conduct a meaningful review. Whilst considering this recommendation it was also noted that this policy aimed to provide internal guidance to officers developing policy documentation, not strategic or business plans of the Council.

27.2.4. Biodiversity Policy

The Temporary Project Support Manager explained that recent changes in legislation had placed a duty on town and parish councils to consider what action could be taken to further the general biodiversity objective. It was therefore proposed that a new policy be introduced to supplement the existing Environment Policy to address this requirement. In recommending the policy the Committee considered it prudent that the District Council and other relevant authorities were referenced as they had powers in this area that the Town Council lacked. It was also thought prudent to clarify the Town Council's activities in this respect in that not only would it aim to minimise harm to the natural environment but also enhance it where possible.

It was therefore resolved that:

1. Subject to the change set out in minute 27.2.2. above regarding subject access requests, the Data Protection Policies, appendix B attached to the report be endorsed and recommended to Council for approval.
2. The update to the email guidance for councillors, appendix C attached to the report be noted.
3. The periodic review date in the Town Council's Policies Policy and Procedure be changed to at least once every four years and recommended to Council for approval.

4. Subject to the changes set out in minute 27.2.4. above, the new Biodiversity Policy, be endorsed and recommended to Council for adoption.

27.3. Quarterly Committee Business Plan Update

The Committee received a report, previously circulated, which provided updates regarding the delivery of the Business Plan objectives as they related to the work of this Committee. It was noted that these updates would be reported to each committee quarterly to enable members to monitor progress. The Committee proceeded to review its objectives. Regarding the proposed refresh of the Visit Littlehampton website, it was noted that whilst the data had been transferred to a new platform, work was still required to update the content. The Town Clerk explained that a lack of response to requests for content required more staff resource, but given the pressure on staff resources progress on this work had been prevented at this time. Acknowledging that recruitment was underway, she added that it was envisaged that this work would resume in January 2025, aiming for completion in readiness for the start of next year's tourist season.

It was resolved that:

1. The update regarding the Visit Littlehampton website project be noted.
2. The progress regarding the delivery of the Business Plan objectives as they related to the work of the Committee be otherwise noted.

27.4 Events Review

27.4.1. The Events and Town Centre Strategy Manager presented a report, previously circulated, which set out the progress with this review. This included the notes of the member led Task and Finish Group and Workshop held on 30 July which had reviewed the final draft of the events survey and provided insight for members on the key considerations in developing an events programme. It was explained that a further workshop was planned for 17 September to have an initial overview of survey results and to begin work looking at what types of events could form the new programme.

27.4.2. It was noted that the survey period closed on 15 September and 170 responses had been received. The feedback would be presented to members at the second workshop. It was also confirmed that this data and the material presented at the workshop would be shared with all members.

It was resolved that:

The update and contents of the report be noted.

27.5 Town Centre Events Periodic Report

27.5.1. Members had before them a report previously circulated, which provided feedback on the outcome of the Summer Love Local High Street Events and an update on the Christmas Lights Switch on and Small Business Saturday events. Members commented on how successful the summer events had been and recorded their thanks to staff for their hard work. Feedback had been excellent with the free activities welcomed by families and positive comments regarding the impact that the events and activities had on the Town Centre environment.

27.5.2. This had been slightly dented by the one recorded incident of anti-social behaviour. Whilst the team on duty had successfully defused the situation Members were angry at the lack of response by the police to the call for assistance that was made. Noting that the incident was being followed up with the police, the overwhelming view of the Committee was that the Town Council should take the opportunity to re-open the conversation with them about local policing. In particular, members wished to see changes to the current regime which was seen as reactive and frequently unresponsive to something that was more proactive and delivered more to support the community and help tackle the causes of crime and anti-social behaviour. It was observed that the implementation of the Business Crime Reduction Partnership was now underway and should provide a mechanism to further this objective and noted that this would be raised at the next meeting of the Town Centre Action Group.

* Councillor Woodman left the meeting at 7.27pm.

27.5.3. The value of the Love Your Local High Street shopping scheme was however questioned particularly as the benefit to local businesses appeared to be minimal. It was noted that officers were currently collating feedback from the business community on the impact of the summer events and that this would be followed up as part of the events review. The Committee was however pleased to note that a way forward had been found to support local businesses on Small Business Saturday and looked forward to the Christmas Lights Switch On, later in the year.

It was resolved that:

1. The feedback and outcome of the Summer Love Local High Street Events be noted.
2. The feedback and outcome of the Love Your Local High Street Shopping Scheme be noted.
3. The updates regarding the Christmas Lights Switch On and proposals for Small Business Saturday be noted.

27.6 Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan Update

27.6.1. The Communications and Marketing Manager presented a report, previously

circulated, which contained an update on work being undertaken as part of the Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan including progress with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Town Centre Support Project. A primary concern was the lack of progress in establishing the sustainable and empowered local business forum envisaged in the Town Centre Support Project and there was discussion as to the contributing factors, including the topic of anti-social behaviour. It was suggested that more targeting of the new businesses that were coming to the High Street might yield some interest. The Committee had been joined by the District Council's Business and Economy Manager who agreed to take this forward as part of her work with local businesses.

It was resolved that:

The updates on the Town Centre Strategy and Action Group and progress with the UKSPF Town Centre Support Project be noted.

28. Finance

28.1 Committee Budget Monitor

The Committee received a report, previously circulated, highlighting significant variances from budget in Income and Expenditure relating to the Policy and Finance Committee. It was noted that the expenditure incurred in respect of Visit Littlehampton related to the introduction of the new website platform.

It was resolved that:

The report be noted.

28.2 Debtors Update

The Committee had before it a report, previously circulated, which contained an update on the progress with debt recovery. It was noted that progress in bringing down these figures was limited since the last report due to staffing constraints. These had now been addressed and work to reduce the outstanding balance was now picking up.

It was resolved that:

The report be noted.

29. Exempt Business

It was Resolved that:

The public and accredited representatives of the press be excluded from the Meeting under Section 100 Local Government Act 1972 due to the

confidential nature of the business to be conducted. The following item was confidential for Members of the Committee only in accordance with Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, being information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person.

30. Town Centre Support Project Update

- 30.1. The Communications and Marketing Manager presented a report, previously circulated to members of the committee only, which provided an overview of the update report that had been received by the consultants. A verbal update was also given on the recent meeting between officers and the consultants regarding progress with delivering the project objectives. This had been prompted by concerns that with the project deadline looming, the objectives would not be met. A key concern was the failure to establish a local business forum which was viewed as essential to support local business growth.
- 30.2. This was attributed partly to the difficulties in moving beyond the anti-social behaviour concerns of the business community but also to the non-viability of the Business Improvement District concept for Littlehampton Town Centre. Through discussions with both the consultants, and the District Council who oversaw the Town Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund bid, a way forward was proposed that would see the Town and District Council take over direct responsibility for delivering the local business forum. With work now underway to establish the BCRP both councils were more confident that the forum could become a reality underpinned by the remaining funding.
- 30.3. A lengthy discussion ensued during which the committee discussed the challenging economic environment and how progress might be achieved with this and the other key objectives of the project. There was a consensus among the committee that working in partnership with the District Council to tackle some of the obstacles in a focussed manner, would see some of the improvements envisaged in the project delivered. It was also the strong view of members that separating events from the town centre management function was essential to this succeeding. Therefore, subject to the confirmation of the District Council's agreement and the separation of the events and town centre management function this was supported as the Town Council's preferred way forward.

It was therefore resolved that:

Authority be delegated to the Town Clerk to take this forward as set out in minutes 30.2. and 30.3. above.

The meeting was closed at 8:20 pm.

Chair